

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUITO 09296 201815Z

45

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INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 9296

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PFOR EC

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ LARA TRIES TO SURMOUNT HIS POLITICAL
DIFFICULTIES

REF: A. QUITO 8931

B. QUITO 9153

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE RODRIGUEZ LARA GOVERNMENT MADE THREE PUBLIC MOVES DECEMBER 19 IN AN ATTEMPT TO CONTROL AND PERHAPS SURMOUNT ITS GROWING POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES. SPEAKING IN GUAYAQUIL, PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ LARA SOUGHT THE COOPERATION OF THE MEDIA IN INSPIRING AND ORIENTING "NATIONAL OPINION" AND BEGAN TO DEFINE WHAT HE MEANS BY HIS "PLAN OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION". IN QUITO, MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT AYALA GAVE HIS FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE SINCE ASSUMING OFFICE, SAYING THAT POLITICAL PARTIES OUGHT TO STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES IN PREPARATION FOR THE OPPORTUNE MOMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS OF "INSTITUTIONALIZATION". THE LEADERS OF THE ARMED FORCES PUT OUT YET ANOTHER COMMUNIQUE PLEDGING THEIR SUPPORT TO THE PRESIDENT. ALL THREE ACTIONS AS A MINIMUM SUGGEST THAT THE PRESIDENT NOW REALIZES HIS DECEMBER 6 SPEECH (REF A) WAS TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE; THAT STRONG OPPOSITION TO HIM CONTINUES; AND THAT SOME FURTHER INDICATION OF HIS PLANS TO RETURN TO CIVIL RULE HAD TO BE GIVEN NOW. NEVERTHELESS, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 QUITO 09296 201815Z

PRESSURES ON HIM TO BE MORE SPECIFIC WILL CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

2. SPEAKING IN GUAYAQUIL ON DECEMBER 19 AT THE GRADUATION OF NAVAL ACADEMY STUDENTS, PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ LARA ADDRESSED HIMSELF AMONG OTHER THINGS TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL QUESTIONS. IN AN ATTEMPT TO PUT AN END TO WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS "A SPIRIT OF SUBVERSION", HE SAID THAT COLOMBIA HAD NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE THAN TO EXPEL THE SO-CALLED "CIVIC FRONT". SPEAKING OF THE MEDIA, HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD PREVIOUSLY HAD ITS SUPPORT, HAD LISTENED TO ITS CRITICISM NO MATTER HOW HARSH, AND HAD CORRECTED THE ERRORS WHICH IT HAD POINTED OUT. NOW, HOWEVER, CERTAIN JOURNALISTS WERE JOINING WITH THEIR ALLIES IN BOGOTA, GUAYAQUIL, QUITO AND BUENOS AIRES TO DEMAND THAT POWER BE PASSED TO A SMALL CONSPIRATORIAL GROUP. IF THE ARMED FORCES DID NOT MAINTAIN THEIR UNITY, THEY WOULD BE ON THE EVE OF THE FALL OF THE GOVERNMENT DUE TO THE "PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTAGION OF THE CONSPIRACY". CITING A DECEMBER 15 COLUMN IN "EL COMERCIO" WHICH HAD MADE THE POINT THAT THE POLITICIANS OF THE "CIVIC FRONT" HAD NOTHING IN COMMON, HE URGED THE MEDIA IN EFFECT TO REPORT WHAT HE CONSIDERED THE REAL SITUATION AND THE REAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HIS GOVERNMENT.

3. COMING TO THE CRUX OF HIS SPEECH, THE PRESIDENT STATED THAT THE PROCESS OF WORKING ON A "PLAN OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION" WAS CONTINUING, AND THAT THE RESULTS WOULD BE SUBMITTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF "NOTABLE JURISTS" AND "REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTIES WHICH, WITH THIS OPPORTUNITY, WILL HAVE TO RESTRUCTURE THEMSELVES, FORTIFY THEMSELVES, AND PLACE THEMSELVES IN A SITUATION OF CONCRETE SUPPORT OF THE MAJORITY OF CITIZENS." HE SAID THE DOCUMENTS THE GOVERNMENT WAS WORKING ON WERE THREE: A LAW GOVERNING PARTIES, A CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD BE SUBMITTED AFTER STUDY AND PREPARATION TO A POPULAR PLEBISCITE, AND AN ELECTORAL LAW.

4. MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT RUBEN DARIO AYALA, GIVING HIS FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE SINCE ASSUMING OFFICE, ALSO SEEMED TO HOLD OUT AN OLIVE BRANCH TO POLITICAL PARTIES. HE SPOKE OF THE NEED FOR THE PARTIES TO STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUITO 09296 201815Z

"IN ORDER THAT WHEN THE OPPORTUNE MOMENT ARRIVES THEY MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION". HE CHARACTERIZED THIS "INSTITUTIONALIZATION" AS A GUARANTEE OF SECURITY IN ORDER THAT THE PEOPLE MIGHT CHOOSE THEIR OWN FUTURE, AVOIDING BOTH A RETURN TO THE PAST OR THE ARMED FORCES RETURNING TO "A NEW RESPONSIBILITY" LIKE THAT OF TODAY. AND HE SAID HE SAW A PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAS BEEN SUGGESTED BY SOME, AS UNLIKELY.

5. MEMBERS OF THE COMBINED COMMAND AND GENERALS AND ADMIRALS OF THE ARMED FORCES PUT OUT A COMMUNIQUE SAYING (AGAIN) THAT THEY WERE UNIFIED IN AN IRONCLAD MANNER, SUPPORTED THE CONDUCT OF THE GOVERNMENT IN ALL OF ITS ACTIONS, AND PROCLAIMING THEIR LOYALTY TO PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ LARA. IF NOTABLE FOR ANYTHING IT WAS FOR THE FACT THAT FIFTEEN ADMIRALS AND GENERALS SIGNED IT, A RECORD THUS FAR.

6. COMMENT: I VIEW THE DECEMBER 19 ACTIONS OF THE GOE AS SIGNIFYING ITS TARDY REALIZATION THAT THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH DECEMBER 6, STATING MERELY THAT HE WOULD REVEAL ON FEBRUARY 16 HIS "PLAN OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION", WAS INSUFFICIENT. INSTEAD OF CALMING THE POLITICAL SITUATION, IT EXACERBATED IT. IN MAKING THE ANNOUNCEMENTS THAT WERE MADE YESTERDAY, THE GOE, IT SEEMS TO ME, WAS TRYING TO CONTROL, SURMOUNT OR AT LEAST DAMPEN THE CONTINUED STRONG POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO IT. IT WAS ALSO OBVIOUSLY TRYING TO BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN THE MEDIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD IT. PERHAPS IN THE SHORT RESPITE WHICH MAY BE CREATED BY THE EXPULSION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE "CIVIC FRONT" FROM COLOMBIA AND THE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR HOLIDAYS THE GOE HOPES TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE OR AT LEAST TO ACHIEVE A PERIOD OF GRACE IN WHICH TO ELABORATE AND THEN DISCUSS WITH "NOTABLE JURISTS" AND "REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTIES" ITS PLANS TO RETURN THE GOVERNMENT TO CIVIL RULE. WHAT CONTINUES ABSENT AND WHAT CONTINUES AT THE HEART OF THE QUESTION IS HOW AND WHEN ALL THIS IS TO BE DONE. RODRIGUEZ LARA HAS NOW UNVEILED A SMALL PART OF HIS PLAN, BUT PRESSURES WILL CONTINUE FOR MORE DETAILS, SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 QUITO 09296 201815Z

7. NEVERTHELESS, AS I HAVE MAINTAINED SINCE SEPTEMBER 1 WITH PERHAPS OBTUSE AND EVEN DUBIOUS DAUNTLESSNESS, RUMORS OF RODRIGUEZ LARA'S POLITICAL DEMISE CONTINUE TO REMAIN PREMATURE. BUT EVEN I LACK THE TEMERITY TO SUGGEST HOW PREMATURE.
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